



## **Briefing n°38: Fighting against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU): Successes from ACP countries**

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<http://brusselsbriefings.net/>

### THE ROLE OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN FIGHTING IUU

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#### **Executive Summary**

With 37% of the overall catch, West African waters are estimated to have the highest levels of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in the world, where illegal fishing activities by industrial trawlers in the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ) has a devastating impact on local communities—depleting stocks, destroying nets and forcing fishermen out of business.

Since 2008, EJF has been operating in some of the region's most affected countries, involving several communities in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, who are trained and equipped with GPS enabled Pentax cameras to take pictures and report incidents of IUU fishing in the IEZ. This, combined with daily satellite-based monitoring activities for the whole African region, allows EJF to gather evidence and prepare so called "IUU alerts" recording the alleged illegal fishing operations. In 2013, EJF issued 27 such alerts while 29 have already been issued in 2014 and submitted to relevant flag and coastal states. Successes of this approach include a year-long complete cessation of illegal trawling in the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ) of Sierra Leone in 2012-2013, fines worth several hundreds of thousand US Dollars paid to coastal and flag states as well as the seizure of IUU fish consignment.

Since 2012, three African countries have been sanctioned under the EU IUU Regulation: Ghana, Guinea and Togo. §49(2) of the EU IUU Regulation has allowed NGOs such as EJF to play a greater role in the fight against IUU by tabling evidence in a formal way. The provision states that "The Commission [...] shall also examine [...] information regarding sighted fishing vessels submitted by citizens, civil society organisations, including environmental organisations, as well as representatives of fisheries or fish trade stakeholder interests." The case of Ghana exemplifies how the EU's market-based approach to combating IUU has positively impacted the other approaches and the efforts of NGOs such as EJF. Over the last two years, EJF had sent about 15 IUU alerts to the Ghanaian authorities and a warning against one of the trawlers alleged to have fished illegally in the IEZ was issued for the first time by the Ghanaian authorities in September 2014 on the occasion of the second out-of-court settlement committee using evidence provided by EJF. The EU IUU Regulation provides a formal platform for the involvement of NGOs and non-state actors and EJF believes that it has become one of the most important and effective tools in combatting IUU globally. The EU Commission and in particular the team at DG Mare should be applauded for their work and the successes they have achieved.

The devastating effects decades of industrial illegal fishing has had on marine biodiversity and the livelihood of local fishermen have led to other problems. Ironically, faced with reduced catch and income, traditional fishermen have themselves reverted to illegal fishing practices, using dynamite and pesticide or fishing in breeding grounds, ignoring some ancestral fishing rules and thus exacerbating the problem

further. While international legal instruments and market-based approaches might help solve the industrial IUU problem, addressing the increasingly used damaging practices of hundreds of thousands of local fishermen will require another type of ground work, which is much more time and resource consuming. With some success, EJF works with governments, local partners and traditional fishermen in the West African region to establish Marine Protected Areas, raise awareness on bio-diversity conservation and create alternative livelihood for coastal communities.

Despite positive developments and certain successes in the fight against IUU fishing in the African region in recent years, there are no clear signs indicating that the phenomenon would quickly disappear. There is no silver bullet in the fight against IUU fishing and a combination of international legal instruments, market sanctions, community engagement on the ground, close collaboration between coastal, state and port states as well as the involvement of non-state actors and NGOs such as EJF is necessary.